

Don Vruwink: The digital classroom

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As I write today about the classrooms of 2018, I can't help but reflect on the 42 years I taught in middle and high school. Gone are the blackboards, overhead projectors, and televisions that used to assist in teaching.

They have been replaced by digital whiteboards and interactive technology, which make the classroom more collaborative and enhance the ability of students to learn critical thinking, communication, and technology skills.

Yet even with such advanced integration, teachers remain the most important way for students to learn and retain information. We will always need well-trained, dedicated professionals to guide the way.

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As a teacher, I would often ask myself, "Don't I impact students' learning with my methods? Do I need all of this technology?" Parents who have been out of high school for 20 years or more may lament how technology has changed education and ask, "What's wrong with the way I learned?"

The fact is that technology has advanced since those days and will continue to advance. We do a disservice to our students if we don't maximize the benefits of technology in all disciplines in the classroom.

If teachers teach the same way they did 15 and 20 years ago, their students miss out on so many learning opportunities. To fully utilize technology in our schools, three things must happen. First, there must be the infrastructure to have a robust network and enough Internet bandwidth to support all of the devices in all of the school buildings. If we want teachers and students to use technology, it must work

fast and consistently, or they will not use it.

Second, we must provide proper professional development. By providing a variety of training and mentoring opportunities, teachers will be more willing to gain new skills. Training and learning opportunities must be available throughout the year.

Third, in order to fully implement and integrate technology, we must provide continued financial support, both from the school district and from the state. The state needs to make a commitment to expand broadband Internet service to all areas of Wisconsin, and local districts need to continue to support their teachers with technology coaches, who should become a part of each building's culture. When teachers don't feel supported, then technology integration will decline.

It is the job of schools to teach the skills needed to keep Wisconsin moving forward. Currently more people are leaving Wisconsin than moving here. Within five years, 65-year-olds are projected to outnumber 18-year-olds. Wisconsin is expected to need an additional 45,000 workers in the next seven years for jobs in health care, information technology, the sciences, sales, customer service, and other high-demand fields.

Rather than look outside our state, let's equip our schools with the technology they need for all subject areas. Let's graduate more students and keep them here in Wisconsin with the knowledge and skills our businesses need.

— *Vruwink, D-Milton. represents the 43rd Assembly District.*